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ABSTRACT

Approximately 43 percent of schools in Norway are nongraded schools. A study of teacher thinking and planning in social studies was carried out in six small, nongraded schools in rural Norway. An obligatory social studies theme in the national curriculum is "the human being in society." At each school, one teacher of students aged 11-13 was observed while presenting four lessons on this theme. The lessons lasted 1 hour to 1 day, and afterward the teacher was interviewed about her understanding of what happened in the classroom and the influence of the larger school context. The teacher's understanding of the instructional patterns in their contextual framework was analyzed in relation to some main goals of education common in pedagogical literature and teacher education in Norway. This paper presents analyses for five teachers. The teachers differed in their ability to cope simultaneously with all the important dimensions of teaching. Only one teacher had a good balance among all dimensions, was able to familiarize herself and the students with appropriate action patterns in the classroom, and therefore created joint control of the teaching situation. The extent to which teachers balanced or overemphasized dimensions of teaching was related to school leadership and school culture. Other findings are concerned with the home-like atmosphere of small ungraded schools, the relationship of such schools to their community, and the nature of teacher knowledge from an epistemological perspective. (Contains 16 references.) (SV)

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Teachers' Thinking And Planning In The Subject Of Social Studies In Small Non-Graded Schools In Norway

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Abstract

This is a research about teachers´ thinking and planning in Social Studies at early secondary level in small multi-aged rural schools in Norway. The teachers´ thinking and planning in such school environments are examined, to get an understanding of how they teach the subject in itself, but also of what seems to stand out as special qualities in such school environments and what must be common to all school settings. The topic focused on, in six case studies, is in the national curriculum named "The human being in meeting with society". The themes in the national curriculum are obligatory themes for teaching in primary schools in Norway. The researcher takes part in four lessons in that topic, lasting from one hour to one day, and after that the teacher is interviewed about how they understand what happened and how they see that as a part of the bigger school context.
The nature of knowledge is seen according to the formal and practical kind of knowledge we proceed to in our society, and refers to Gary Fenstermacher´s (1994) epistemological analysis of teachers´ thinking. The teachers´ arguments are seen from a retrospective point of view, a kind of reconstructed logic (Pendlebury 1990). The main research question is: What sources of knowledge do the teachers build their thinking and planning upon? The teachers´ practical arguments are understood through Alfred Schutz´(1970, 1982) phenomenological/ sociological perspectives combined with an hermeneutical analysis. The reference scheme is the common didactical activity structures as we know them in pedagogical literature and teacher education. These reference schemes are analyzed according to coded activity structures and activity segments.

I partly teach in teacher education at Nesna College in Norway and I partly am a research fellow at the University of Trondheim, working on what shall be my thesis for a doctor's degree. Before entering teacher education 12 years ago, I was a primary school teacher myself. My research deals with teachers' thinking and planning in the subject of Social Studies in non-graded classes in small rural schools in Norway. Approximately 43% of the schools in Norway are non-graded schools. The children of the classes in my research project are from eleven to thirteen years old. The topic I am focussing on is a compulsory topic in the national curriculum called "The human being in meeting with society." This theme is more exactly operationalized as: to work with ordinarily accepted norms and rules for how to behave, being together and cooperate in society, to work with matters that are of importance for interaction between people in different roles, and to examine how society has been arranged to fill the needs we have. I have analyzed five case studies so far, and I have one case study left.

Through my research I want to understand teaching in such schools and compare it with both the kind of knowledge we try to give the students during their teacher education and the nature of knowledge we produce in our society. In accordance with Fenstermacher (1994), I regard the epistemology or theory of knowledge as being divided into practical and formal knowledge. These two kinds of knowledge are seen as distinct but interdependent. That means that I, through practical arguments, try to understand practical as well as formal aspects of teachers' knowledge. The teachers' arguments are seen from a retrospective point of view, as a kind of reconstructed logic, as Pendlebury (1990) calls it.

I took part in four lessons, one for each of the teachers, of the subject. The lessons lasted from one hour to one day. After studying the schedules and becoming accustomed to the environment, I took part in each lesson and interviewed the teacher afterwards, about her intentions, how she understood what happened and how she saw that as a part of the whole context she acted in. All teachers were female.

My main question is: "What are the sources that teachers base their thinking and planning on?" The supporting questions are: "On what knowledge base does the teacher try to make teaching valid for the student?", "What does teaching in such schools tell us about teaching generally?" and "How can we understand the teachers' knowledge in an epistemological perspective?"

My work is built on Alfred Schutz' (1970, 1982) phenomenological/ sociological perspectives. I combine a phenomenological understanding with a hermeneutic analysis. In agreement to what are my perspectives on good teaching, I am trying to identify the teacher's understanding of the instructional patterns in their contextual framework. The teacher's thinking and planning is analyzed in accordance with some main goals in child education. The reference scheme are didactical activity structures, agendas, and purposes that are common in pedagogical literature and teacher education in Norway.

The teacher's thinking and planning is analyzed with the help of Bjørndal and Lieberg's model of didactical analysis (1978). This model sees teaching relations such as content, purpose of teaching, teaching activities, and evaluation as a connected whole. As we think of didactical structures in Norway and as Schutz explains it, teaching has its social forms, its ideal cultural objects or "referential

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scheme". These forms, which develop in each teaching context, have their own action patterns. The action patterns which are contingent to each teacher's thinking and planning and how she explains that in "in-order-to motives" and in "because-of motives" are analyzed according to activity structures and coded activity segments, such as pacing, which, according to Stodolsky (1988), indicates who sets the rate of work during a segment, student location, option, feedback, teacher role, cognitive level, social objectives, needed skills, expected student interaction, student behavior, and student involvement.

The teachers' understanding of those action patterns are analyzed in a phenomenological perspective regarding their aspects of practical and formal knowledge. After analyzing the activity segments, I can hermeneutically understand the action patterns of the teachers' thinking and planning, how they planned the teaching and how it was carried out in a contextual framework.

In this paper I will present the three main points that determine the value of teaching for the students:

- Teachers do not cope easily with all the important dimensions of teaching at once.
- Focusing on some dimensions of teaching seems to be part of the whole school environment and makes the schools quite different.
- What are the special qualities of those schools, and how can they be strengthened.

I will furthermore briefly discuss the last supporting question: "How can we understand the teachers' knowledge in an epistemological perspective."

Teachers do not cope easily with all the important dimensions of teaching at a time

In my research I have experienced that a single dimension of teaching is often focused upon, and other dimensions are consequently neglected. When one dimension has a strong priority as an important aspect of the teacher's thinking, this influences the whole situation. It creates "action patterns" (Schutz 1967, 1970) that influence the whole system and the possibilities of utilizing other supporting dimensions. This also easily makes the teaching teacher-directed, even when the social interaction between teacher and students is well-suited for more complex teaching methods.

Some teachers tend to concentrate on interacting with the students, without working on the development of a clear structure of how to cope with each other and interact during the Social Studies lessons. The focus on value clarification, for instance the cognitive dimension of teaching, supporting the students to think on their own, is a very important dimension of teaching, but it can be overestimated. Ozer (1992), points out that disclosure of personal values and concepts can be really perplexing for people, but it does not necessarily affect their stereotypes.

Because there are only few students it can easily be assumed that the social climate is created through interactional patterns which are a continuation of the daily action patterns in the home environments. On the other hand, where many people work together it seems necessary to structure the settings and the learning of how to deal with each other.

For instance, one of the teachers I interviewed organized a group discussion with eight students about the rules of how to behave in the classroom. She wanted to let them all come with their opinions and discuss the norms and rules together before she continued the discussion together with them, trying to reach an agreement on the most important rules. When she lead the discussion, she tried to get everybody involved. But during the students' discussion on their own, only some of them were heard. Instructing the students, she did not make it clear who should be the leader of the group, how they should ensure that all who wanted to say something were listened to, and what they should learn as the social aspect of working together. Then, of course, some of the students dominated the discussion and left others behind. The teacher also struggled to create order for getting the students' suggestions for classroom rules. Sometimes the students waited for their turn to speak, at other times two ore more were speaking at the same time. This teacher wanted to have the students' voices in the matter, but unclear structure of the work also made the students' voices unclear. The teacher did not feel that this was a good situation. She nevertheless argued that it was very important to listen to the students. They are the next ones to rule this society, she argued.

Another teacher one-sidedly focused on pacing the students' work. This made the teaching rather technical, although she tried to have a dialogue with the students during their work. She declared, for instance, that she did not like drama activities, arguing that she found such activities ineffective. There was a calm atmosphere in the classroom, but an atmosphere more characterized by the children obeying the teacher than cooperating with her. Many of the students though, especially some of the girls, worked very well. These girls, answering questions and discussing subject matters, also acted on a high cognitive level. Other students' cognitive engagement and work involvement, however, was on a much lower level. Especially one boy was unable to fulfill the demands of work.

A third teacher combined the interactive dimension between teacher and students with clear demands according to how to communicate and create a good

atmosphere in the classroom. She herself acted as a good example for the students, by, for instance, hugging them, appraising their work, telling jokes. She created a quite relaxed and happily sharing atmosphere. The communication level between teacher and students, combined with clear demands, led to learning many social and factual concepts, although the work of the students should have been structured more intentionally. The students seemed familiar with working in groups, but not to project-work in groups. The teacher was not familiar with this last method well enough to ensure that the students could manage to structure their work, or, in other words, she had not gradually taught them the necessary structures for this kind of work. When they had a project-work together in groups, they had trouble, even though two teachers were supervising three groups of four to five students.

Project-oriented work, as it is defined as a compulsory working method in our national curriculum, especially requires that the students have learned some activity structures. Project work, according to the national curriculum, shall primarily be done in cooperative groups. The meaning of project here is not only seen in the sense of reform pedagogics, but also, more specifically, as a teaching method. To manage such an activity format, the students must be familiar with some specific action patterns. The students must have learned to form group processes, to distribute roles and tasks in the group, to define the goals of their work, to set up a working plan, and to write a log or notes of reflection, to accept that each member of the group cannot work at the same level, to tolerate and help each other, to seriously evaluate and give each other constructive feedback, and so on. Then they can more easily take responsibility for their work. They have to gradually respond to "action patterns" and learn to work on their own. They must also learn to be aware of the social aspects of the work, to evaluate those aspects, and to learn from their experiences.

A fourth teacher was able to take care of all the dimensions in her teaching adjusted to the students she interacted with. She structured the work in a way that involved the students and let them take part in the structuring of the work. The students seemed to regard the teacher's way of structuring the work as a common structure. That enabled them, as a part of this framework, to structure their further work on their own. They had learned some action patterns of how to work. The teacher also repeated what the different working structures demanded from them. For instance, one student said during their project work that he remembered how they worked last time they worked in this way. He obviously liked both knowing how to cope with the work and the cooperation between the students where one was able to help the younger ones.

This teacher had a clear leadership and joint control at the same time, which made it easier to use different rooms when they worked in groups, to let the students work partly on their own and interact with each other. She also created a good interaction both among the students and between the students and the teacher. It seemed as if, when the teacher clearly structured the lessons, the close interaction and the small environments easily lead to an "on-task" behavior, an engaged interaction, and a calm atmosphere.

A well-structured work, whether it is structured by the teacher or the students, facilitates a good interaction between all the involved parts. As Grannis (1978) points out, this must be gradually learned in a balance between the teacher's modeling of competence to be acquired on the one hand and the learner's consolidation of a competence through its application in self-directed expression and problem solving on the other. There can sometimes be a playing back and forth of activities embodying different forms of control, but the teacher must be aware of which control is needed in each activity.

The fifth teacher used more than anyone different teaching methods, for instance playing games, making stories, watching video and group discussion, but she really had problems with the interactional part of teaching. During teacher-paced activities, many of the students, especially the oldest ones, did not cooperate. They openly disturbed the teaching, talking together about other things, shouting to each other across the room, giving racist declarations during discussion, and so on. As a matter of fact, many of these students worked on their best during student-paced activities, especially when they worked in homogenous groups. In such a setting it should, however, be a goal to cooperate in heterogeneous groups. This requires focusing on the social dimension of the group interaction, what was very difficult to effectuate in this teaching context.

The situation, of course, made the teacher sometimes starting reprisals. She altered between being very calm and friendly and angrily blaming them. Most of the time she tried to be very supporting, although many of the students behaved very badly. Although she was really frustrated and did not know what to do, she was strongly arguing for the seventies' humanistic view of democracy. Hoping for a better cooperation, she for instance often rearranged the classroom, letting the students together decide where to sit and whom to sit together with.

To sum up the dominating dimensions in teachers' thinking and planning, it can again be pointed out that teaching is a very complicated task. It is not easy to cope with all the important dimensions of teaching at once. One important dimension is the interaction between students and teacher. The teacher must, however, also structure the work in a way that makes both the students and herself familiar with

the action patterns. Only one of the these five teachers in my research had a very good balance according to what the contextual framework of the situation required from both the students and the teacher herself in the situation, a balance which created a joint control of the teaching situation.

The form of instruction must be seen as a part of the actual intellectual content of instruction. As Stodolsky (1988) points out, learning action patterns does not only depend on learning how to work, but also what content that work demands in itself. In arranging the classroom activity structure, more complex thinking should also be a part of the teacher's repertoire. The teacher cannot be technical in advising the students' work. Students should be able to understand the way of working as a part of solving a problem. If the students do not manage, they are subjected to much negative and unintended learning. The teacher should help them to be able to arrange their work in a way that gives them good feelings when working together. Schoolwork should give the students positive experiences. Then good action patterns are learned more easily.

I think that all schools have much in common, be they small or big, rural or urban. Pedagogical literature very often focuses on one dimension of teaching a time. This perhaps leads the teachers to focus on single dimensions of teaching and to neglect the whole of action patterns. Although some kinds of work can easily be worked out in such small school environments with only nine to eighteen students in a class, in the long run all the important dimensions of teaching should be taken care of.

Interaction through shared understanding of action patterns helps the students being able to work on their own in particular situations. This is a part of being able to act responsibly, understanding what a situation demands from them and being able to discuss the processes and what happens. When children are safe and they know according to what structures they have to proceed, they can be able to explore themselves more creatively and better work on their own. Without such agreed working conditions, neither the students can manage their cooperating and learning processes nor the teacher can stimulate the students' learning processes. The Norwegian National Curriculum states (p. 28): "Good teaching pushes the learning processes forward - but it is completed only by the students own contribution".

If the teaching shall be valuable for the students, there should be, as Dale (1986) points out, an interactional process, a social production of meaning, and an interactional chain of stimulus and response. In an interaction the actor "reads" the "signs" in the context. In a teaching context there are so many "signs" that have to be understood if the teaching-and learning—processes shall "flow" well. This is especially important on the primary school level, where we have to change activities with their working patterns very often.

There must also be room for spontaneity and the challenges of everyday life in the learning processes. The teacher must comprehend the students' perspectives and try to view the matters from their point of view. The teacher must also walk aside and, adjusted to the actual class, let the students have experiences of their own. She must dare to sometimes present challenges for the students, even if it is not certain that they will manage. Through common experience and analysis, they can furthermore turn negative experiences into positive learning. But there must be a balance. Teaching tasks can very easily be too complicated and give some students many negative experiences.

It seems as if, when the teacher structures the lessons, the students are also able to cooperate and take responsibility. Developmentally, this last example of thinking and acting occurred, as Grannis (1978) expresses it, not as a step between teacher and student control, but as a step beyond teacher and student control, the resolution of a conflict for control. The teacher should nevertheless be a visible leader.

Stressing some dimensions of teaching seemed to be in accordance with the way the school leadership was carried out and affected the whole school culture

The teachers in my case studies had been working as teachers for at least eight years and had all been in their respective schools for several years. The individual teacher's deeper level of assumptions and beliefs seemed to be in accordance with the deeper assumptions and beliefs behind the way school leadership was carried out. Although there were similarities between such small schools, some of the schools in my case studies had developed their own quite special culture. Culture is here defined as: "the deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organization" (Schein 1985, pp. 6-7).

The teacher who balanced the many dimensions of teaching in the best way worked in a school characterized by a well-constructed school leadership. In contrast to that, the school where the students set up against the teacher, the teacher did not get much support from the school leadership. The leader of the school had almost the same problems with these children. The children were partly treated like colleagues, but the leadership was too invisible to follow up intended goals for that interaction and what the students could learn from it. It thereby also seemed to be quite difficult for the teacher to change her ways of working. As a matter of fact, it seemed necessary to change the whole way of running the school.

As Siskin (1994) points out, the instructional philosophy of a school also influences classroom procedures. Solstad (1994), in his research on Norwegian schools, also found that there generally appear to be a clear, but complicated relationship between the cultural features of a school and the organizational manifestations. This was quite evident in the ways classrooms and school life were organized in some of the schools I examined, assuming that a small number of people can affect each other and form their culture more easily. There seemed to be a clear connection between the different parts that affected the school environments in such small schools. The workplace of teaching in these schools seemed to be, according to the concepts used by Siskin (1994, s. 39), very embedded and socially constructed.

Some special qualities of those schools, and how they can be strengthened.

An especially important quality of the small non-graded schools I examined was their close atmosphere and the possibilities of interaction between students and teachers. This was evidently a qualitative resource. But this resource had to be developed and refined. A good working atmosphere did not develop alone.

When work was structured, interaction between students and teacher was also very good. The structuring should not necessarily consist of formal demands made by the teacher, but it should be an outcome of the teaching as an interaction gradually built up as action patterns. This involves that the teacher should adjust her work according to social circumstances in teaching. The teacher should focus on different aspects of teaching situations and ensure that important aspects of the settings are evaluated, mostly by the students. In small societies, the children also bring to school the conflicts and the alliances of their society. Without structuring the methods used and as a part of that the social dimension of the work, the conflicts and the social hierarchies becomes a part of the lessons.

Research done in Norway by Bru (1998) shows that there is almost the same amount of harassment and emotional problems in small rural schools as in large urban schools. Therefore teachers in small rural schools should also systematically work to develop a supporting environment. To structure such pedagogical intentions requires a pedagogical leadership. The teacher should not be more relaxed than she can be in bigger schools. There should also be a visible school leadership.

The teachers I interviewed had few children to cope with. They all knew the children, their family and the surrounding society very well and saw the children as a part of a bigger context. The number of children and organizing the children in a multi-aged class can be a very important asset of such schools (Kvalsund, 1995). To really be an asset it must also be used as an asset in the teachers' thinking and planning. All the teachers in my case-studies were aware of these assets. They for instance organized the students in mixed-age groups most of the time in the lessons which I took part in.

In non-graded schools the activity structures from one subject lesson to another alter very much. In Norway the students in small rural schools are most often divided into even smaller groups in subjects characterized by a progressive knowledge, such as for instance mathematics and language studies. Very often the teacher in such settings allows the students to work and collaborate as they want by themselves. They can help each other, and even though this help is not part of a system, they work in a quite self-circumscribed setting, asking the teacher for help when they need it. This working on their own keeps them busy and the atmosphere may be quite home-minded and relaxed. In such a setting the students can also be allowed to talk without raising their hands in order to be allowed to.

This can of course be a very good working condition in a home-minded atmosphere. Other working conditions, however, require other action patterns. When the students then in other subjects, such as in Social Studies, join a bigger group with far more students, where the intention is to teach the whole group in a way that makes sense of co-education, the students must act according to a new setting. That demands knowledge of structures and at least that the teacher knows what the two different settings demand from all the persons involved in it. The teacher must structure the work in a way that makes the students aware of what rules should be followed in different settings. This is a matter of familiarity to action patterns. Such action patterns are as important in small non-graded schools as they are in urban schools, especially when the structures of the lessons in different subjects are rather different. It is, however, easy to forget this in such an open and intimate atmosphere which can exist in small non-graded schools.

In these cases I very often observed that, after the class had changed to a new structure, the teacher told the students to raise their hand before they should be allowed to talk, and they very often did not. Sometimes the teacher needs structure and action patterns to orchestrate teaching. This was a problem in some of the schools where there existed a form of home-minded communication with its vague action patterns.

In Norway Marit Rismak (1998) has studied what happens when the teacher tries to work out a system for the students of raising their hands to get their turn to talk. She found that the teacher very easily lets the students talk without raising their hands. The teacher often wants the talk to flow, seeing that it can create a good conversation in many situations. Some students learn very quickly to use the

possibilities such settings give them being allowed to talk more and being heard more often than others. If their answers are right, they are more easily allowed to talk without raising their hands. If they at the beginning of their talk use the same words as the teacher ended with, they get through easier with their breaking in.

It seems as if these mechanisms are very easily utilized in small non-graded schools. Of course, the teacher sometimes wants to let the talk flow easily and having a natural and relaxed interaction between students being together in many settings, for instance in a group discussion. The teacher has to communicate what each setting requires from the students, in agreement with the action patterns they are familiar to and has to evaluate these settings together with the children.

As Vestre (1980) found in his research on how the last national curriculum was implemented in different kinds of Norwegian schools, students more often help each other in such non-graded schools than in fully graded schools. When this is focused on as an important quality of their work, they can also better succeed supporting each other. I my research the students in the well-organized interactional working class most often supported other students. We also recognized that they sometimes discussed the quality of each other's work.

An apparent quality of such non-graded schools is the communication with the surrounding society, for instance through making arrangements in cooperation with people in the surrounding society and cooperating with people outside the school environment in activities as for instance project-work. The class where the teacher most often solely puts the cognitive dimension of teaching ahead, took, for instance, part in collecting money for a partner community in Russia. This was a very practical work and something the students actually managed on their own, both entertaining, selling coffee, and cleaning up after the arrangement. Although only one of the teaching programs in my research contained such an activity, all the teachers could tell about many of such arrangements for the whole school that were organized together with people in the surrounding society.

This is consistent with what Solstad (1994) found in his research examining schooling and change in Norway. He compared small schools with larger schools and found that small schools more often than larger schools took or planned to take action in different areas such as local environment and the home situation and were more concerned about local issues. Students in such schools know the school's physical environment and they can easily participate in order to make an arrangement or working to arrange something practical for a lesson. The students can be a kind of working colleges in many practical settings. Small groups of students make it rather easy to work together in such practical settings.

Another quality which Solstad (1994) found when comparing small and large schools was that small schools more often manipulated the timetable to accomplish adapted education and had a somewhat higher flexibility in timetabling. This is consistent with what I found in my case studies. All the teachers used a quite flexible timetabling. They had also all moved away from a rigid ordinary school day of six lessons of 45 minutes. The conclusion must be that such schools have many assets depending on that the people working there strengthen these assets. The teachers in my case studies were aware of many of these assets, although pitfalls often seemed hard to avoid.

How can we understand the teachers' knowledge in an epistemological perspective?

In my research I see that during practicing, the teachers' language of teaching is most of all the practical language, although the practical aspects have their formal support. I suppose that they used more formal language passing their exam in teacher education. Teachers who use clear formal concepts trying to explain what they are doing, also are the teachers who best manage the practical teaching on a good level. The teacher who had a very good balance according to the different dimensions of teaching, also used most formal concepts of what she was thinking and doing. The content of her teaching was social as well as conceptual on different levels. She set the means and the ends of the activities in accordance with the contextual framework and the students' qualifications for managing the activities. She was also aware of what she wanted to develop further, by herself and through her students.

The teachers had different values, most of all as a part of their personal "tact", as van Manen (1995) calls it, but also as a part of "being modern" in a misunderstood way, as I would argue. Single teaching dimensions, such as the cognitive dimension or the democracy dimension, or being very occupied with pacing and the outcome of teaching could be overestimated in a way that this influenced the whole situation. Although other dimensions also indirectly were a part of their action patterns, these overestimated dimensions made it difficult for the teacher to develop a good interaction between herself and the students and being able to orchestrate the teaching.

Teaching needs both formal and practical knowledge in a good balance between many different teaching dimensions. Besides that, the teachers' personal attitudes are of great importance for how the teaching is arranged. Although the national curriculum defines the subject tasks to be settled out, teaching demonstrates considerable subjective variation. Prevalent research (Siskin, 1994) supports the

fact that this is especially apparent in the subject of Social Studies

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